News

Haggard's fall: Readers weigh in

He's the same

Pastor Ted is a truly great religious leader. He built New Life Church up from a basement pulpit to the largest church in the city. As leader of the national evangelical movement, Haggard set an example other Christian leaders sought to follow.

Last week, Ted Haggard essentially admitted to having a strong sexual attraction to men, as well as a related interest in illicit drugs. Married with five children, there's little question he lived a "dual life." He's not alone. An estimated 12 percent of the U.S. population leads alternative lifestyles.

According to the letter he wrote to members, Haggard expressed intense shame and guilt about these desires and behaviors. He wrote: "I've been warring against it all of my adult life." Unfortunately, in his suffering, he was totally alone. Did the intensity of his shame influence the ferocity of his opposition to gay marriage? Was the battle he fought against men and women seeking formal recognition of their lifelong commitment really just a battle with his own inner demons?

Rather than asking for forgiveness, Pastor Ted should ask for acceptance.

It's time we accept these desires, whether youthful "experiments" or lifelong "gay partnerships," are a natural part of the human sexual experience. With acceptance, Pastor Ted remains a widely loved and highly influential religious leader. With demonization and exclusion, Haggard is removed as pastor and forced outside his church, possibly, permanently. What kind of example does that set?

Ted Haggard today is no different from the Ted Haggard of last week, last month, or anytime prior to these revelations. He should be recognized today as the same caring, charismatic leader whose New Life Church has grown to become the largest church in the city.

Rather than asking for forgiveness, Pastor Ted should ask for acceptance. And New Life Church would set quite an example by giving it to him, and the other one in eight Americans living alternative lifestyles.

— Ed Gallagher
Colorado Springs

Simple message

Re: Ted Haggard and the "New Life Church": AhhhHAHAHAHA!!!!! HAHAHAHA!!! HAHAHA!!!

— Bruce Short
Manitou Springs

How would Jesus judge?

I really feel sorry for people that get involved in these huge public scandals, such as Mr. and Mrs. Haggard, because rather than looking at a whole person, we have a tendency to judge a person for the last act that they have committed. We always focus on the negative.

We should let the punishment fit the crime, and remember that the man that we are judging is a man of God. I am sure he has done some really great things. Therefore, we should judge him the way Jesus would. When the crowd went to stone the one woman, Jesus grabbed her arm and said let the one without any sin cast the first stone.

We all have something in our past that we are not very proud of. Would we like a church of thousands to find out what it is? His congregation has about 14,000 people in it. Who among us would like to tell it all to that many people?

Is it just fun to watch a man go down? Has anyone considered what his wife is going through? What about his children?

— Cynthia Lang
Colorado Springs

Pierce the shell

I confess: I used to be homophobic. I thought gays were sexual deviants who willingly chose that lifestyle. That was before I came to have friends living that lifestyle. They were treated as outcasts. They watched friends die of AIDS, and lived knowing their sexual orientation put them at greater risk of the same fate. Who would voluntarily choose this lifestyle?

I discovered they were good people with the same values, hopes and dreams as everyone else. During the '90s, much of the world came to

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Mouths of madness

Quotes from the Haggard scandal

"I felt it was my responsibility to my fellow brothers and sisters, that I had to take a stand, and I cannot sit back anymore and hear to me [what] is an anti-gay message."

— Mike Jones, a male escort from Denver, who alleged on-air to Denver talk-show host Peter Boyles last week that he had gay sex with and sold illegal drugs to the Rev. Ted Haggard

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"I've never had a gay relationship with anybody, and I'm steady with my wife. I'm faithful to my wife."

— Haggard in his initial denial of allegations on 9News in Denver

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"He's the big buck in the herd, and he has a bull's eye on him, and anyone can take a shot."

— Pastor Dave Davis, of Living Springs Worship Center in Colorado Springs, expressing disbelief about the allegations in an interview late last week with the Independent

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"Hi Mike, this is Art [Haggard's middle name]. Hey, I am here in Denver and sorry that I missed you. As I said, if you want to go ahead and get the stuff, then that would be great, and then I'll get it sometime next week or the week after or whatever."

— voicemail to Jones allegedly left by Haggard

"I was tempted, but I never used it."

— Haggard, in a later admission to news organizations that he bought methamphetamine and received a massage from Jones

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"I am a deceiver and a liar. There is part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I've been warring against it all of my adult life. ... The accusations that have been leveled against me are not all true, but enough of them are true that I have been appropriately and lovingly removed from ministry."

— Ted Haggard in a statement read Sunday by Pastor Larry Stockstill to New Life Church congregants

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"We started this journey together and with the grace of God, we will finish together. ... For those of you who have been concerned that my marriage was so perfect I could not possibly relate to the women who are facing great difficulties, know that this will never again be the case. My test has begun; watch me."

— Gayle Haggard, Ted Haggard's wife, in a statement read Sunday by Pastor Larry Stockstill to New Life Church congregants

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"The media is just salivating out there, it seems, over yet another example of what they see as hypocrisy. And it takes me back to the Jimmy Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart period of time when all of Christiandom was condemned, it seemed, because of the misbehavior of those two religious leaders."

— James Dobson, leader of Focus on the Family, on his Monday broadcast, following Haggard's removal from New Life Church

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"Evangelicals have to acknowledge that there are people in our own churches who struggle with this temptation. Including leaders. We all know Ted has struggled with this issue. That shouldn't be a big surprise. The gay community resents it when we don't acknowledge it. And he did."

— Richard Cizik, the vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals, as quoted by Salon.com after Haggard was removed

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"No pastor in America holds more sway over the political direction of evangelicalism than does Pastor Ted, and no church more than New Life."

— Harper's *magazine article, May 2005*

— Compiled by Michael de Yoanna

recognize this. When I moved back to my hometown of Colorado Springs, I was disappointed, even shocked, to discover the extent of the fear and hatred. Here lived an enclave still mired in the intolerance that had evaporated in much of the world I knew.

I'm not a fan of the Rev. Ted Haggard — because he helped lead the charge against gay rights. But it's sad he had to live a secret life for fear he would be judged a sinner. Last week, while his congregation waited for the full story, there were expressions of support, compassion and trust in Rev. Haggard. Members of his community felt he was a good man.

Wouldn't it be great if they wouldn't change their mind now? Could their relationship with a gay man who did a lot of good in his community lead them to understand sexual orientation is not a deviant, willing, conscious choice made by evil people?

I offer a prayer for those who've coalesced into an impervious ball of intolerance. I hope they might let their relationship with Ted Haggard pierce that hard shell and allow love and compassion to seep in. Ted Haggard lived a lie because he could not choose to be straight, and he was ashamed of the sexual orientation he was born with.

— Dave Gardner
Colorado Springs

No sin by definition

This is a very sad time for Pastor Ted, his family and those that are part of his ministry. Let's hope that all the prayers that are being offered for him are said not so much as to seek forgiveness for Pastor Ted's 'sins', but, yet, are done more so to seek enlightenment and acceptance of homosexuality.

Pastor Ted — the most convincing proof that being gay is *not* a choice. Gay people are *not* sinners by definition, but human beings deserving of love and acceptance.

— Leslie Deutschlander
Monument

Open letter to the right

Dear religious right [dare I say, "Republican"] fundamentalist,

Are you happy now? You've had, regardless of the sly methods, your fundamentalist president and Congress in power, and where are we now? Your fear-based, empirically corrupt rhetoric finally paid off, to you, and look at all the names in lights — DeLay, Abramoff, Foley and, now, Haggard, to name a few. You've had your opportunity to prove that your version of the Bible (complete with deprecation of the pro-equality, peace-keeping, anti-corporation Jesus) was best, deviously launching us into a botched war.

Now, what do you have to say for yourself? Besides distorting the real message of Christ, you've brought our country into religious fascism. Thanks a lot. Turn learning from history into a cliché, and as you would have it, I'll be looking at you sunken and bug-eyed from the other side of the barbed wire soon enough, since last time they rounded us up first.

— Howie Acosta
Arcata, Calif.

Somewhere out there

I wonder if there is a slightly tilted parallel universe to ours. One where leaders from socially acceptable homosexual inclinations deny the heterosexual lifestyle, while practicing heterosexual acts behind closed doors. Wouldn't that be funny? The defrocked leader's name could be Haggard Ted.

— Malcolm Allyn
Fountain

Every ounce of faith

Let's start this off by saying that what has happened to Ted Haggard's family and supporters is tragic.

However, this is a perfect example of the "you choose to be gay" stand. Choosing to live your public life as a heterosexual when everything inside you says you are homosexual is bound to eventually explode in your face.

Had Haggard lived in social environment that accepted gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people (GLBT) in the first place, an environment that nurtured and encouraged his personal and spiritual growth, and accepted him with love regardless of his sexual orientation, all of this hurt and devastation might have been avoided. Who knows who that Ted Haggard might have been? Perhaps the gay pastor and founder of New Life Church?

Those of us who have lived and learned the hard way, by being GLBT all our lives or coming out willingly at some point, understand the sacrifice and danger that is heaped upon us and our lifestyle by the hypocritical right-wing evangelical governing types. We have lived with the pain and devastation of losing our families, homes, jobs, friends, customers, possessions, prestige and money on a daily basis in some cases.

Mr. Haggard and his family, friends and supporters, whatever is left of them, have a long way to go over very hard roads. He will need every ounce of faith he has ever had to endure.

In the end, however his struggle turns out, Haggard should rest assured that the GLBT community will likely eventually accept him as one of our own if he recants and repents for all of the evil work and rhetoric he has created against them. If you want our support, you can contact the GLBT community outreach programs through the Pikes Peak Gay and Lesbian Community Center, like the rest of us had to.

— Rob Beam
Colorado Springs

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Slash and crash

County budget cuts could endanger social services

By Naomi Zeveloff

The massive budget cuts that El Paso County officials have anticipated for years are finally a reality. And while the county's social services department scrambles to maintain food stamp and child welfare programs at current levels, the poor face what could be an even heavier burden.

"Did we cut [the budget for] Human Services? Sure," says County Commissioner Wayne Williams.

The department was one of a handful that sustained major cuts to balance the $7.2 million shortfall in the 2007 budget, which was approved by the commissioners at last Thursday's board meeting.

'There comes a point when ... you are cutting from the bone.'

— Commissioner Sallie Clark

Since Human Services relies heavily on matching grant money from state and federal resources, the $164,050 budget cut could actually mean a total deficit of around $820,000 for the department.

"We serve so many families," says department director Barbara Drake. "We have made a commitment not to make any reductions."

The department provides economic assistance and childcare, as well as

says. "They were concerned about our department, and they knew we are a real safety net for the community."

But in a chapter of the adopted budget, Drake admits to fears that the cuts could impede her department's ability to provide "timely processed benefits" for El Paso County's skyrocketing population.

"... caseloads become too high when staffing cannot be maintained at authorized levels," she writes.

The county has also cut services like the Sheriff's Work Release Program, which allowed county inmates to stay employed as they served jail sentences. Another $350,000 will be deleted from the county's major maintenance projects, like roof replacement.

"This one-time solution of 'Don't replace everything this year' works for a little bit," says Williams. "In my family, if we don't have enough money, we delay buying a new car, and that works for a year. But at some point, you have to buy a new one."

The budget shortfall can be attributed to an ever-dropping mill levy in El Paso County, aggravated in part by TABOR restrictions and unfunded state mandates. Years ago, says County Commissioner Board Chair Sallie Clark, taxpayers were charged 11 mills to fund county services. The 2007 rate of 7.71 mills is the second-lowest levy in more than two decades.

"We are very lean in terms of our budget, and while that is a good thing, there comes a point when you are not cutting from the fat, you are cutting from the bone," says Clark.

She adds that county employees have endured two wage freezes over